



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

DRUG SMUGGLER WHO CONCEALED 700 POUNDS OF DRUGS IN BUILDING BLOCKS SENTENCED TO 16 YEARS IN PRISON

BROWNSVILLE, Texas — A Mexican drug smuggler, who hid cocaine and methamphetamine in building blocks, was sentenced today to 192 months in prison, announced U.S. Attorney Chuck Rosenberg and Alonzo Pena, special agent-in-charge of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) office in San Antonio.

Jose Luis Castillo-Meza, 37, a resident of Rio Bravo, Tamaulipas, Mexico, received the 16-year prison sentence and a five-year term of supervised release by Federal District Judge Andrew Hanen. Castillo-Meza pleaded guilty April 7 to possession with intent to distribute about 328 kilograms of cocaine and 7.7 kilograms of methamphetamine.

This investigation began in November 2004 when Chicago law enforcement officials seized drug money in paint cans from a tractor-trailer destined for a Harlingen, Texas, warehouse. They reported this information to ICE special agents. ICE special agents in Brownsville proceeded to the warehouse and found four individuals, including Castillo-Meza. Castillo-Meza, who initially gave a false name, identified himself as the warehouse supervisor. One man was in the process of loading pallets of building blocks onto a tractor-trailer, while the driver was strapping the loads, which was to be delivered to San Antonio that evening.

During a search, agents found paint cans and other pallets of building blocks. A canine drug detection dog alerted to the pallets. Agents took a sample block, which appeared normal, to the nearby international bridge for X-rays. The X-rays revealed bundles hidden within the block. Agents ultimately found 328.9 kilograms (723 pounds) of cocaine and 7.7 kilograms (17 pounds) of methamphetamine concealed in the blocks.

Castillo-Meza and the forklift operator were arrested. Further investigation revealed that Castillo-Meza had bought the building blocks and mortar to seal up the hollow areas and had paid more than \$5,000 cash. Both Castillo-Meza and the forklift driver had previously loaded and delivered a similar load of blocks to a location in San Antonio.

Special agents from the ICE Brownsville office, with the assistance of the Harlingen Police Department, conducted the investigation. Castillo-Meza was ordered remanded to the custody of the Bureau of Prisons to begin serving his 192-month sentence. The forklift operator was tried before a jury in April and found not guilty.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Oscar Ponce prosecuted this case.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.